

MAKING A LIVING IN THE DESERT

total Papago income, but farming furnishes basic subsistence for over three-quarters of the families on the Reservation. It is now believed that cattle will never be fundamental in Papago economy but should be regarded as a supplement to the real basis of Reservation life—farming. 434
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Other sources of income are few. About 6 per cent of tribal income (including subsistence) is derived from firewood and fenceposts cut from mesquite. There are known small deposits of gold, silver, lead, and manganese on the Reservation, but they are in the hands of whites and offer nothing but a little employment to Indians, as the Papago have only surface rights to their land, and any mineral rights belong to the federal government. (Any miner may acquire rights on payment of rental of the land and fees for destruction of property.) This is a sore point with the Papago, since they are the only Indians who do not have rights to minerals under their lands. 434
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Handicrafts furnish a small part of tribal income—about 3 per cent. The bulk of this income comes from the sale of baskets and pottery⁴ through the tribal Arts and Crafts Board, which was established under the auspices of the federal Indian Arts and Crafts Board to provide a market for Papago handicrafts. Papago baskets, made of yucca, willow, bear grass, and devil's-claw, are of the close-coil type; decorative design in black and white, with occasional green or red, is simple but often strikingly beautiful in its sharp contrasts. Through assisting the Papago to improve their work and get better prices for it, the Arts and Crafts Board should help to raise Reservation income. It should also give the Desert People experience in co-operative business which may serve as a foundation for ventures in other fields. 434
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There are a few small Papago business enterprises on the Reservation, most of them trading posts, but returns from these stores are a minute fraction of tribal income. An increasing share of Papago income is from paid labor. As previously stated, for generations the Desert People tided themselves over lean years by going to Mexico or to the Pima country to work for ranchers or farmers, who paid them in food and seed. Now, however, wage work (and cattle sales) are shifting Papago economy from a barter to a cash basis. Em- 434
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4. The reason for this anomalous situation are partly political. Under the Gadsden Purchase Treaty of 1854, the United States agreed to respect the laws and customs prevailing in the area under Mexican rule. Since Spanish days, mineral rights had belonged to the crown or the state. For two years (1932-34) Papago lands were withdrawn from mineral entry and claim, but removal of the treaty provisions was made a part of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. Papago resentment is understandable, since some other Indian tribes derive substantial income from mineral leases. Known deposits on the Reservation are small, but there is always the chance of discovery, since great copper deposits are being worked near by.

5. The Papago also make twillike cups, wooden spoons, and other articles, chiefly for their own use.

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players are the mining companies (chiefly at Ajo west of the Reservation), 434
surrounding ranchers, and the foremen of the cotton fields along the Salt, 464
Gila, and Santa Cruz rivers. Work in the cotton fields is largely on a family
basis, but individuals work in the mines and in households in near-by cities.
During the war there was an increasing demand for Papago labor, and some
went to distant points to work in factories of all kinds. The government is
also an employer: the Agency hires over a hundred Papago as clerks, bus-
drivers, school housekeepers, range riders, and in other capacities, chiefly as
unskilled laborers.

Even with the addition of wages, Papago income is very low. In 1940, before 434
war wages had swollen the total, the average family income (including esti- 511
mated value of products used by the family) was about \$530 per year, but this
does not present a true picture, for two-thirds of the families had incomes of
only \$265 or less. The more prosperous third, whose incomes brought up the
average, were those with cattle, permanent jobs, or private business enter-
prises, most of whom lived in the southern and eastern districts. In 1943, war
jobs, military allotments and extensive cattle sales forced by the drought
brought average family income up to about \$1,200, but this is obviously a situ-
ation unlikely to be duplicated.⁶

THE FUTURE OF PAPAGO ECONOMY

We have seen that the Papago live in a rural peasant economy which has 439
only recently shifted to a cash basis. Money is increasingly important to the 441 ●
Desert People because they no longer produce most of their own food and
clothing. A recent study of Papago food habits showed that over half the food
used in the period of the study was purchased.⁷ Even beef is often sold, and
meat is bought.

Many things are imported which could be produced locally. There is a flour
mill on the Reservation, but all flour sold at trading posts is imported. Though
cattle-raising is the chief Papago cash industry, all the meat sold in two of the
three Reservation stores handling this product is imported.

Almost all business on the Reservation is in non-Indian hands. A recent
report states: "It is estimated that of every \$100 that is received by the Papago,
some \$50 goes immediately into the hands of businessmen off the reservations.
Not only does \$90 out of every \$100 received from the export of produce, cattle,

6. It is interesting to note that in this year the Papago family income was not much above the
average per capita income for the country as a whole, \$1,831 (Charles F. Schwartz, "State Income
Payments in 1943," Table 1). For the state of Arizona, per capita income was \$805.

7. Emma Bell, "An Economic Study of the Papago Indian Reservation, Arizona" (MS).

THE DESERT PEOPLE

439 and labor go immediately for the import of food and clothing, but the 25 per
 441 cent of this amount which represents the retail profit is lost to the Indians.⁸

657 The Agency has proposed that Reservation stores should be either co-operatively or individually owned and run by Indians and stocked through large-scale co-operative buying. This would provide both better goods at lower prices and employment for Indians.

The government has also encouraged the Tribal Council to set up a Fair and Rodeo Board, which has constructed buildings and grounds for tribal fairs. A Loan Board has been established to lend money to stockmen and farmers.

Other improvements in Papago economy have been suggested by the Agency staff or the Tribal Council. Recently the council requested the opportunity to resettle several hundred families on Indian lands along the Colorado River which are to be opened to other tribes. (Whether families can actually be persuaded to relocate is problematical.) The Agency has plans for bringing in water to certain areas, conserving present resources by introducing new types of plant growth, and acquiring the use of range lands outside the Reservation. These plans, however, depend upon considerably increased appropriations of federal funds.

181 It is obvious that, with what have been termed the poorest natural resources of any Indian reservation,⁹ with rapidly increasing population, and with no immediate prospects of more land, the Papago must conserve and improve what resources they have if they are to go on living in their desert country. Despite this critical situation, the Papago are not a harried people. They do not feel the urge to outdo their neighbors which often creates frustration in a completely competitive economy. Their standard of living and the satisfaction they derive from their way of life cannot be measured in terms of dollars and cents, though they are coming to feel the necessity for cash and to value the things it can procure. Nor do they have the sense of being hemmed in, and the consequent bitterness against their white neighbors that is characteristic of many Indian tribes whose lands have been steadily reduced. The Papago are aware that the government in many concrete ways has made easier their life in a hard environment. This is not to say that white American civilization has not brought conflicts, has not disturbed the old ways of life. But the Papago still live on the land that has been theirs for centuries, and they do not feel it threatened by white encroachment.

And this is important because their land is all-important to them. All the Desert People—even those who leave the Reservation to take jobs—keep their

8. *Program, Papago Reservations, Arizona*, p. 43.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 53.